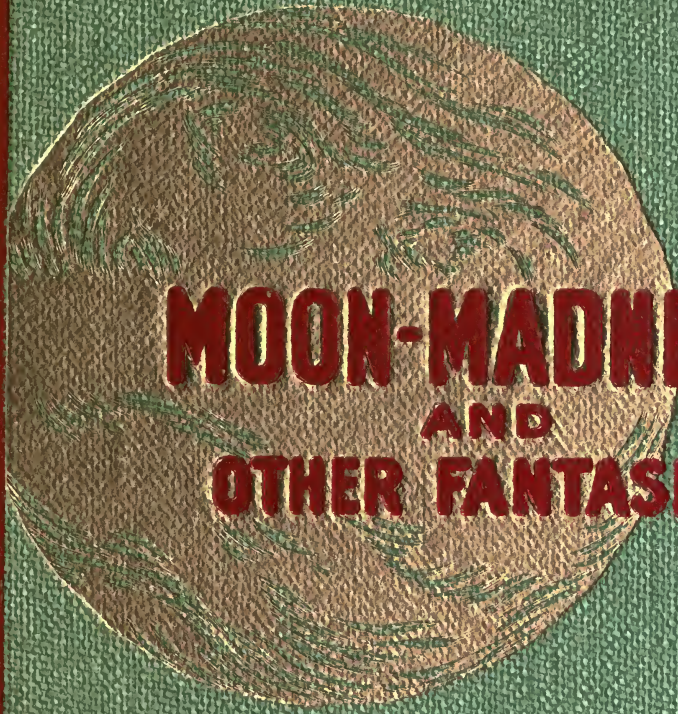

MOON-MADNESS AND OTHER FANTASIES

AIMÉE CROCKER GOURAUD

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Moon-Madness

and

Other Fantasies

by

Aimée Crocker Gouraud

(4th Edition)

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To

THOSE WHO KNOW

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"OUR LADY OF RED LIPS"

Moon-Madness

"OUR LADY OF RED LIPS"

THE place was Paris.

A man stood in front of an art-dealer's window, and looked at the painted picture of a woman.

The man was about twenty-five years of age and extremely handsome.

He was big and brawny.

His hair was brown and curly, and his eyes were blue and frank.

The woman was about thirty years of age, and exceedingly beautiful.

She was small and slender.

Her complexion was creamy white, her hair was inky black, her eyes were dark green, and her lips were bright red.

If you were French, you could tell that the man was American.

And if you were an American, you could tell that the woman was French.

The man stood and stared at the picture.

He stared at the white complexion—but he had seen complexion like that before.

He stared at the black hair—but he had also seen hair like that before.

He stared at the green eyes—but he had even seen eyes like that before.

He stared at the red lips—and he had never seen lips like that before.

He had never thought of such lips.

He had never dreamed of such lips.

Of course their vivid crimson color was unnatural, fantastic, grotesque.

The picture must have been designed for a poster.

But nevertheless it fascinated the man strangely.

The white face seemed to turn to him.

The green eyes seemed to look at him.

The red lips seemed to smile at him.

The man hesitated.

And then he went into the shop.

"What is that picture?" said the man.

"That is the portrait of a lady," said the proprietor.

"Who painted it?" said the man.

"Paul Gaspard," said the proprietor.

"Is he well known?" said the man.

"He would have been—had he lived," said the proprietor.

"Is he dead?" said the man.

"Yes," said the proprietor, "he died six months ago, under peculiar circumstances."

"Tell me about it," said the man.

"He was young, and he was clever, and he was handsome," said the proprietor, "men admired him, and women loved him. The lady who posed for this portrait was one of those who loved him. She had loved other men. She had loved an Italian prince. But he died. She had loved an English lord. But he died, also. And then—she loved Paul Gaspard."

"And then he too died!" said the man.

"Yes—and he too died!" said the proprietor.

"How did he die?" said the man.

"Nobody knows how—or why," said the proprietor. "He was found dead in his bed one morning. That was all. There was

some sort of a wound, or a scar, on his breast, over his heart. For a time the coroner was puzzled. At first there was some thought of suicide—or even of murder. But, in the end, the authorities decided that Paul Gaspard had died from natural causes, and there the matter ended."

"And the picture," said the man.

"The picture had just been finished on the very day he died," said the proprietor, "by a strange coincidence."

"Very strange indeed!" said the man.

"Paul Gaspard had from time to time borrowed sums of money from me, until he owed me in all some fifteen hundred francs," said the proprietor, "so when he died, and left no money, I claimed the picture—and I got it."

"And the lady who posed for it?" said the man.

"She left Paris as soon as Paul Gaspard was in his grave," said the proprietor.

"Where did she go?" said the man.

"To St. Petersburg—with a Russian duke," said the proprietor.

"Is she there now?" said the man.

"No, she is at Monte Carlo," said the proprietor.

"With the Russian duke?" said the man.

"No, she is there alone," said the proprietor.

"Where is the Russian duke?" said the man.

"He is dead," said the proprietor.

"Dead?" said the man.

"Yes, dead," said the proprietor, "as dead as all the rest of her lovers!"

"The devil!" said the man.

"Quite so!" said the proprietor.

"And the name of this woman," said the man, "what is it?"

"She calls herself Elise Du Barry," said the proprietor, "but other people call her something else."

"What do they call her?" said the man.

"'Our Lady of Red Lips'!" said the proprietor.

The man thanked the proprietor, and left the shop.

In the street he stopped before the window once more, and stood and stared at the picture.

"'Our Lady of Red Lips'," muttered the man.

And, as he left the window, and walked away, he murmured, "Monte Carlo!"

That night the man dreamed a strange and startling dream.

First he dreamed of black hair.

Hair as black as night.

It covered the heavens and the earth. There was nothing else in the world but black hair.

Then he dreamed of white skin.

Skin as white as snow.

It covered the heavens and the earth.

There was nothing else in the world but white skin.

Then he dreamed of green eyes.

Eyes as green as the sea.

They covered the heavens and the earth.

There was nothing else in the world but green eyes.

Then he dreamed of red lips.

Lips as red as blood.

They covered the heavens and the earth.

There was nothing else in the world but red lips.

The lips kissed him on the brow.

He felt as though he were swooning.

The lips kissed him on the mouth.

He felt as though he were dying.

The lips kissed him on the heart.

He felt as though the world were coming to an end.

His soul was full of terror.

He uttered a shriek.

And then—he awoke.

The next day the man left Paris.

He went to Monte Carlo.

* * * * *

The man's name was Howard Leslie.

He was a New Yorker.

He was an only son, and his father was a millionaire.

This was his first visit to Monte Carlo.

He walked into the Casino.

He looked at the people.

They were strange to see.

And the people looked at him.

He was good to behold.

The celebrated habitues of the place passed before him.

He saw Madame de Lara, the Italian singer.

And La Belle Bolero, the Spanish dancer.

Yvonne Yvette, the French model.

And Olga Maronoff, the Russian poetess.

And then—with a bound of the heart, and a gasp of the breath—he saw *her!*

Elise Du Barry—Our Lady of Red Lips! . . . . . .

She wore a white satin evening gown.

There were big pearls in her hair, around her throat, and on her fingers.

Her complexion was as white as her gown.

Not a touch of color, in her dress, or in her face—except her mouth.

But, just as the setting sun will dominate an evening sky, so did this crimson mouth dominate this ashen face, and this pallid figure. One was conscious of the woman's mouth, first, last, and all the time.

One could not help but be conscious of it.

Howard Leslie stood and stared at her.

And she paused and glanced at him.

How like she was to her portrait!

Or rather, how like her portrait was to her!

At last the white face did in reality turn to him!

At last the green eyes did in reality look at him!

At last the red lips did in reality smile at him!

And then Elise Du Barry passed by.

Howard Leslie followed her.

She sat at one of the tables.

He stood beside her.

She put down some gold—on the red.

She lost.

He put down some gold—on the black.

He won.

She looked up at him.

He looked down at her.

Their eyes met—his so frank and blue, and hers so strange and green.

He spoke to her.

She answered him.

He didn't know what he was saying to her.

He didn't know what she was saying to him.

He only knew that he and she were talking together.

He only knew that he and she were walking together—out of the Casino. . . . . .

* * * * *

One month passed.

And then, one day, all Monte Carlo, all Europe, and in fact all the world, was surprised and shocked to learn that Elise Du Barry, a celebrated French beauty, had been strangled at Monte Carlo, and that the man in whose company she had been much seen of late, Howard Leslie, a young American millionaire, had become a raving maniac. The madman, in his paroxysms, constantly clutched his breast, where there was some sort of a wound, or a scar, and he continually cried,

"Heart's blood! Heart's blood! Heart's blood!"

The throat of Elise Du Barry had been dreadfully disfigured by the strong hands that had crushed the life out of her, but her mouth was still a bright crimson color, thus entitling the woman, even in death, to the name by which she had been popularly known in life—that of "Our Lady of Red Lips." . . . . .

PAULA LOVED PEARLS

PAULA LOVED PEARLS

PAULA didn't care for diamonds.
Or rubies.
Or emeralds.

She only cared for pearls.

And her feeling was more than mere admiration.

It was—love.

Passionate love.

But she could not afford to have pearls *to wear.*

So she had to be content to have pearls *to look at.*

She used to stand in front of the jewellers' windows where there were pearls displayed.

The rings delighted her.

The brooches bewildered her.

But the necklaces distracted her.

She used to gaze at them.

She used to gloat over them.

And then she would go home—relieved.

But not satisfied.

In her bedroom Paula had pictures on the walls.

Many were studies of women wearing pearls.

Empresses and actresses.

In her bedroom Paula had books on the tables.

Many were volumes treating of pearls.

Their formation and their history.

Often Paula would go to sleep at night reading one of these books.

Or looking at one of these pictures.

Then she would dream that she had pearls of her own.

Plenty of them.

And she would be happy.

So you see that Paula had a mania.

But she also had a husband.

Her husband didn't have any money.

But he had a position.

A position with an exporting concern.

This concern did business in the Far East.

So a time came when Paula's husband was sent to the Orient.

And when Paula's husband went there—he took Paula with him.

They went to Japan.

And to China.

And to India.

In India Paula saw strange things.

She saw the Hindoos bathing in the sacred Ganges.

She saw the Parsees exposing their dead to the vultures.

And she saw fakirs making mango trees grow out of seeds before one's very eyes.

And in India Paula heard strange things, too.

She heard of strange lives.

And of strange deaths.

And she heard of the Rajah of Raboda who owned the finest pearls in the world.

He was said to have pearl necklaces yards long.

And pearl pendants the size of walnuts.

And he was said to be willing and glad to display these treasures to any visitors who cared to journey to his palace in the hills to see them.

Paula told her husband of these things.

He was not interested.

Paula asked her husband to take her to Raboda.

He declined.

Paula asked her husband if she might go there alone.

He consented.

So Paula got a letter of introduction from the Consul.

And she started for the hills.

Paula arrived at the Palace.

She presented her credentials.

And she was informed that she might see the pearls.

An attendant escorted her through corridors and courts, into an apartment where, in a glass case under iron bars, were displayed the objects that Paula loved.

Loved with all her heart.

And with all her soul. . . . . .

Paula stood there transfixed with ecstasy.

She stood there—she knew not how long.

And then she became conscious that someone was standing beside her.

Someone was watching her.

Paula looked up.

She found herself facing a tall man wearing a green satin robe and a lavender silk turban.

Around his neck was a string of pearls.

In his turban was a clasp of pearls.

And in his eyes—was a strange expression. . . . . .

"I am the Rajah of Raboda," said the man.

"Oh!" said the woman.

"These pearls are mine," said the man.

"They are marvellous!" said the woman.

"You like pearls?" said the man.

"I—love—them!" said the woman.

It really was a strange thing that Paula had not made a more advantageous marriage than she had done.

Her husband was not of much account.

And Paula was—quite a beauty.

Her complexion was dark.

Her hair was black and glossy.

Her eyes were black and fiery.

And her lips were full and red.

She was just the type to appeal to an American millionaire.

Or—to an Indian Prince.

But Paula had never met an American millionaire.

And she had never met an Indian Prince—before. . . . . .

She looked at the face of the Rajah.

His skin was black.

But his hair and his eyes were no blacker than her own.

If she only looked into his eyes, he might have been a mate for her.

If he only looked into her eyes she might have been a mate for him.

And now he *did* look into her eyes.

And now she *did* look into his. . . . . .

Paula loved pearls.

And the Rajah loved—women.

The Rajah *had* pearls.

And Paula *was*—a woman.

So they stood side by side.

And they stared at one another.

Then the Rajah showed Paula more pearls.

He conducted her about the palace.

He offered her some refreshments.

And he invited her to be his guest over night.

Paula accepted his attentions.

And his invitation.

She wondered if she were asleep.

And if this were a dream.

One of those marvellous dreams of hers.

She had imagined it all so often before.
But no, this was not a vision!
It was a reality!
She was the guest of an Indian Prince.
The Prince had the finest pearls in the world.
And he—liked her.
She appealed to him.
So Paula—thought, and thought, and thought. . . . . .

That night the Rajah put on even more gorgeous robes than he had worn during the day.
And even more splendid pearls.
Paula forgot to look at his black face.
She forgot to think of it.
She only looked at his white pearls.
She couldn't think of anything else.
The Rajah told Paula of how his ancestors had obtained these pearls from afar.
How they had sought for them.
How they had fought for them.
This one had been in the eye of a Buddha.
That one had been the cause of a battle.
And so on, and on, and on. . . . . .
Then he stopped speaking of—pearls.

And he started speaking of—her.
His voice softened.
His eyes brightened
And at last—he said it.
He was a prince.
He possessed pearls.
He—loved—her! . . . . .

What did it matter?
Where was the harm?
What was a—husband?
What was—anything?
The Rajah held her hand in his.
There were pearls in the rings on his fingers.
The Rajah put his arm around her waist.
There were pearls in the bracelets on his wrists.
The Rajah crushed her to his breast.
There were pearls in the chains around his neck. . . . . .

Paula returned to her husband.
She wore a string of pearls around her throat.
She gave her husband an explanation.

She said that she had bought the pearls in a shop.
She told him that they were imitation.
And he believed her.
And she despised him for it.
Poor fool!
He didn't know the value of pearls.
But the Rajah of Raboda did.
And so did Paula! . . . . . .

THE DANCE OF THE COBRA

THE DANCE OF THE COBRA

THE Place was the Harem.
The Time was the Morning.
And the Occasion was the Toilet.

The wives and the women of the Maharajah were being made beautiful for the pleasure of their lord and master.

Their bodies were bathed in the pool.

And anointed with oils.

And burnished with buffers.

With infinite care and patience, blue veins were traced on their limbs, and red tips were painted on their breasts.

Their raven locks were scented, and their dusky cheeks were tinted.

Their eyes were darkened with kohl, and their mouths were brightened with carmine.

The nails of their fingers and of their toes were stained a ruddy hue.

But none of the wives or the women demanded or received more care or attention than did Lotus Flower, the favorite dancing girl of the Maharajah.

For none was so lithe of limb nor so

supple of joint as was this same Lotus Flower.

She it was who could sway the slowest.

And she it was who could whirl the fastest.

Lotus Flower was a young Circassian beauty.

She had been brought from Bagdad.

For two days the Maharajah had had in the palace as his guest an English officer, one Captain Esme Lawrence.

And for two nights Lotus Flower had been summoned to the Court of Delight to dance before the visitor.

The first night Lotus Flower had performed the Dance of the Flames.

She had pirouetted in and out among lighted candles.

The English officer had watched her intently.

The second night Lotus Flower had performed the Dance of the Sword.

During her gyrations she had borne a scimitar upon her head.

Again the English officer had watched her intently.

To-night Lotus Flower was to perform the Dance of the Cobra.

And to-morrow morning the English officer was to go away.

Lotus Flower must do credit to the Maharajah.

And to herself.

She did not need to be told so.

She understood it fully.

So she devoted the entire morning to the beautifying of her body.

And she devoted the entire afternoon to the selecting of her adornments.

The English officer had watched her hands.

So she put jingling bracelets around her wrists.

The English officer had watched her feet.

So she put jangling bangles around her ankles.

The English officer had watched her body.

So she swathed herself in gleaming gauze.

And the English officer had watched her face.

So she painted, perfumed and powdered until even the other dancing girls admitted among themselves that Lotus Flower had never looked lovelier.

But still Lotus Flower was not satisfied.

The English officer had watched her eyes.

So she put cosmetics around them to make them darker.

And she put cosmetics into them to make them brighter.

But that was not why he had watched her.

That was not *how* he had watched her.

He had looked beyond the blackness of cosmetics.

He had looked beyond the whiteness of cosmetics.

He had looked in, in, in—to her soul.

And her soul had looked out, out, out—to him.

Lotus Flower realized that she did not need kohl and carmine with which to charm the English officer.

And this knowledge made her glad.

And this knowledge made her sad, too—at the same time.

Do you doubt that such a paradoxical state of mind could exist?

Out upon you then,—truly you can know but little of the ways of woman! . . . . . .

That night a splendid repast was served in the Great Banquet Hall.

Afterwards the Maharajah escorted his guest to the Court of Delight.

Two throne-like chairs were brought forward for the two men, the Indian Prince and the English officer.

The Maharajah wore pantaloons of crimson silk, a coat of purple velvet embroidered in gold, and a turban of yellow silk embellished with an aigrette of diamonds.

Around his neck were strings of pearls.

And on his fingers were enormous rubies.

The Maharajah was an ugly man.

But he looked magnificent.

Captain Lawrence wore the conventional evening clothes of an English gentleman.

He was a handsome man.

And he looked attractive.

A young boy with a stringed instrument sang two songs for them.

One was a song of joy.

And one was a song of sorrow.

An old man with a black cloth did some tricks for them.

First he made various objects appear out of the cloth.

And then he made various objects disappear into it.

Finally, to the beating of tom-toms, and the lilting of pipes, Lotus Flower was brought forward for her part of the performance.

She bowed before the Maharajah, but she almost forgot to look at him.

Then she looked at Captain Lawrence, but she almost forgot to bow to him.

The Maharajah looked at Lotus Flower and he smiled.

Captain Lawrence looked at Lotus Flower and he did not smile.

He was too much interested in her to remember to smile.

Just as she was too much interested in him to remember to bow.

Once more she felt that he was looking in, in, in—to her soul.

And once more she felt that her soul was looking out, out, out—to him.

"Lotus Flower," said the Maharajah, "you must dance your best to-night!"

"Yes, my lord," said Lotus Flower.

"To-morrow our guest departs," said the Maharajah.

"Yes, my lord," said Lotus Flower.

"He returns to England—where he is going to be married," said the Maharajah.

Lotus Flower stood and stared.

Her heart stopped beating.

She gasped for breath.

"Yes, my lord," said Lotus Flower.

She had known that the English officer was departing the next day.

But she had not known that he was going to leave India.

She had not known that he was going back to England.

And she had not known that he—was going to be married.

Somehow, she had imagined, from his eyes, that he was going to stay in India.

Somehow, she had imagined, from his eyes, that she was going to see him again.

Somehow, she had imagined, from his eyes, that he—and she—

But now, all her hopes had been shattered.

All her dreams had been dispelled.

There was nothing for her to do—but to dance! . . . . . .

And so she began.

She waved her arms.

Her bracelets jingled.

She stamped her feet.

Her anklets jangled.

The tom-toms began to throb.

The pipes began to lilt.

And Lotus Flower started to perform the Dance of the Cobra.

She swayed from side to side.

She darted to and fro.

She floated backwards and forwards.

Slowly at first.

Then faster and faster.

Finally she stopped.

"Is that the end of the Dance of the Cobra?" asked Captain Lawrence.

"No," said the Maharajah, "that is only the beginning."

Lotus Flower had been nerving herself for the ordeal.

She had been working herself up for the performance.

And now it began in earnest.

A strong eunuch stood guard over a big basket.

Lotus Flower stooped down, lifted the cover, thrust in her arms, and drew out a large cobra.

The cobra wriggled and writhed in her clutch.

The tom-toms started again.

And the pipes.

At first, Lotus Flower held the cobra far from her.

Then a little closer.

And at last, she placed it upon her body.

As she danced around, the cobra twined about her.

It crawled in and out among the soft folds of her gauzy drapery.

It disarranged the coverings of her shoulders.

And of her breast

And of her waist.

Thus it was that Lotus Flower postured and posed before the Maharajah and his guest, her naked body gleaming under the light of the lamps, and the great cruel cobra crawling over her lithe young limbs.

The cobra twined about her shoulders.

Lotus Flower darted here and there.

The cobra twisted about her thighs.

Lotus Flower rushed hither and thither.

She seemed fairly to fly.

The notes of the music accompanied her.

And then, suddenly, the music ceased, and two big eunuchs sprang forward to tear the cobra from her body.

That was part of the performance.

The climax had come.

But—what was this?

Had the dancer gone mad?

Lotus Flower fought off the eunuchs.

She clung to the cobra.

It pressed tightly about her waist.

But Lotus Flower pressed it tighter still.

The eunuchs fought with her.

But Lotus Flower fought against them.

The Maharajah sprang up from his chair.

And Captain Lawrence sprang up from his.

They rushed towards the unfortunate dancer, to assist the eunuchs in attempting to save her.

But it was too late.

Lotus Flower lay on the ground.

The cobra was coiled about her in a grip of steel.

A grip of steel that would crush the life out of any human being.

Lotus Flower, the favorite dancing girl of the Maharajah, was dead. . . . . .

Two days later Captain Esme Lawrence left India, and went back to England—to be married.

THE PAINTED MRS. PERRY

THE PAINTED MRS. PERRY

HE was twenty.

She was thirty-five.

There was fifteen years difference between them.

And a great deal more.

Gordon was simple, even for twenty.

Mrs. Perry was complex, even for thirty-five.

He didn't know anything.

She knew everything.

They were both good-looking.

He was good-looking, and he looked good.

She was good-looking, and she looked bad.

He had a healthy face, and a wholesome manner.

She had an unhealthy face, and an unwholesome manner.

He was absolutely natural.

She was absolutely artificial.

Until Gordon met Mrs. Perry, he had only known girls, school girls.

He had never known a woman, a woman-of-the-world.

Gordon had a man-friend.

The man-friend had a woman-friend.

The woman-friend was Mrs. Perry.

Gordon was at a cafe with the man.

The woman was there with another man.

Gordon and the woman were introduced.

They came, they saw, and they conquered.

He conquered her.

And she conquered him.

He had never seen anything quite so wonderful as this woman.

She fascinated him.

And she had never seen anything quite so wonderful as this boy.

He fascinated her.

She invited him to call on her.

He accepted the invitation.

And he called.

She had suggested nine P. M.

So at nine P. M. he came.

Mrs. Perry lived in her own house.

Gordon was ushered into the drawing-room.

The walls were hung with pink silken brocade.

The floor was covered with pink silken rugs.

The lamps were shaded with pink silken screens.

Pink roses were in vases and bowls on the gilded mantel-piece, and on the gilded tables.

The gilded furniture was upholstered in pink brocade.

And Mrs. Perry was dressed in black.

She wore a long clinging robe, low at the neck, and short at the sleeves.

In her ears, on her breast, and on her fingers, were big barbaric looking emeralds.

On her face was a quantity of make-up.

Her cheeks were painted white, her lids were painted blue, and her lips were painted red.

Her hair was dyed the color of burnished copper, and was worn in a weirdly wonderful way.

Mrs. Perry looked at Gordon.

Gordon looked at Mrs. Perry.

She smiled.

He blushed.

She motioned to him to be seated—in a chair beside a sofa.

He took the chair—after she had taken the sofa.

He fidgetted with his hands.

His hands were big and strong.

She fidgetted with her feet.

Her feet were small and shapely.

"I didn't know if you would come or not," said Mrs. Perry.

"But you invited me to!" said Gordon.

"I know I did," said Mrs. Perry.

"And I said that I would," said Gordon.

"I know that too," said Mrs. Perry.

"Then why wouldn't I come?" said Gordon.

"I don't know," said Mrs. Perry, "but I thought that you might be—afraid."

"Afraid of—what?" said Gordon.

"Afraid of—me," said Mrs. Perry.

"Of you?" said Gordon.

"Or of—yourself," said Mrs. Perry.

"Of myself?" said Gordon.

"Yes," said Mrs. Perry, "you are so good-looking."

Gordon blushed.

"And so am I!" said Mrs. Perry.

Gordon stammered.

"Don't you think I am?" said Mrs. Perry.

"Of course I do!" said Gordon.

"And don't you know that you are?" said Mrs. Perry.

"Of course I don't!" said Gordon.

"Well, *I do!*" said Mrs. Perry, "and *you* are!"

She put her feet up on the sofa, so that she was reclining at full length beside him.

He moved his chair away.

"Don't go further!" said Mrs. Perry, "but come nearer!"

He came nearer.

"That's a good boy!" said Mrs. Perry, "a very good boy!"

He looked shy.

She looked sly.

"Do you object to my smoking?" said Mrs. Perry.

"Not at all," said Gordon.

He opened his case.

She took a cigarette.

He lighted it for her.

"Since you have been obliging enough to let me have a cigarette," said Mrs. Perry, "I will be obliging enough to let you have a—kiss!"

He looked amazed.

She looked amused.

He hesitated.

She held up her face.

He kissed her—on the mouth . . . . . .

"And now we are friends!" said Mrs. Perry, "but we must be more intimate friends yet. We must know one another better. Much better. Very much better. Mustn't we?"

"Yes," said Gordon.

She put out her hand and touched him on the knee.

He shrank away from her.

She blew a puff of smoke into his face.

"You must tell me all about yourself," said Mrs. Perry.

And he did—under her clever manipulation.

"And I must tell you all about myself," said Mrs. Perry.

But she did not—again under her clever manipulation.

When Gordon got up to go, the clock was chiming twelve o'clock at night.

And when Gordon finally did go, the clock was chiming three o'clock in the morning.

They had been together for six hours.

. . . . . .

Mrs. Perry asked Gordon to come again.

He said that he would.

And he did.

The next night.

And the next.

And the next.

And after that, he came every night—for two weeks.

He didn't go anywhere else.

He didn't want to go anywhere else.

First, Gordon and Mrs. Perry left the pink drawing-room for the yellow sitting-room.

And then, they left the yellow sitting-room for the lavender boudoir.

It was in the lavender boudoir one evening, at the end of the two weeks, while they were smoking perfumed cigarettes, and sipping absinthe, Mrs. Perry made a strange and startling statement.

"Gordon," said Mrs. Perry, "you must never come to see me again!"

"What do you mean?" said Gordon.

"I mean that you are a boy with a future," said Mrs. Perry, "and I am a woman with a past."

"Oh, don't talk like that!" said Gordon.

"But I must talk like that!" said Mrs. Perry, "you have a life before you, I have a life behind me. We are not equally matched."

"We are!" said Gordon.

"It isn't fair," said Mrs. Perry.

"It is!" said Gordon.

"We can't be friends," said Mrs. Perry.

"We can," said Gordon.

"No—we can't," said Mrs. Perry, "and we—sha'n't!"

"But why—why?" said Gordon.

"Because you are a dear sweet boy," said Mrs. Perry, "and because I—I have got a painted face!"

"I love you," said Gordon.

"I have got a painted face," repeated Mrs. Perry.

"I love you," repeated Gordon.

"Do you love me—in spite of my painted face?" whispered Mrs. Perry.

"No, I love you—on account of it!" whispered Gordon.

And it was so.

And she knew it.

The surprise was—that he knew it.

But Gordon had learned a lot—in two weeks. . . . . .

KARA THE FAITHFUL

KARA THE FAITHFUL

WHEN the Rajah of Jurma was twenty-eight years of age, he believed himself to be happy.

But when the Rajah of Jurma was twenty-nine years of age, he *knew* himself to be happy.

At twenty-eight, the Rajah had a noble title and a splendid fortune.

But at twenty-nine the Rajah had also—a beautiful wife.

So what more could mortal man desire?

The Rajah had been brought up by a wise father.

He had been taught self-restraint.

And he had become a virtuous man.

The Ranee had been brought up by a foolish mother.

She had been taught self-indulgence.

And she had become a vicious woman.

The Rajah was kind and considerate.

The Ranee was unkind and inconsiderate.

But the Ranee had a beautiful face.

And the Rajah had a bountiful fortune.

So when he had sought her hand in marriage, she had readily consented.

And the Rajah of Jurma deemed himself blessed.

In the morning she would walk with him.

And he would smile with satisfaction.

In the afternoon she would talk with him.

And he would laugh with happiness.

In the evening she would lie in his arms.

And he would weep with ecstasy.

He provided her with silken robes and with jeweled ornaments.

And she had a whole retinue of servants to wait upon her.

She had men to hold umbrellas over her when she went out.

She had men to sway fans above her when she stayed in.

And she had women to dress her and to undress her, and to do her bidding throughout the day and throughout the night.

These, and more, had the Ranee.

But the Rajah had—Kara.

And the Ranee was—jealous.

And something—else.

Kara was the personal attendant of the Rajah.

He was five years younger than his master.

And five times handsomer.

At least he seemed so—to the Ranee.

Kara had been in the service of the Rajah for seven years.

And he was highly thought of.

He had proved himself worthy of the confidence that had been placed in him.

He had accompanied his master into danger.

He had served him in health.

And he had nursed him in sickness.

So all this meant a great deal to the Rajah.

(The Rajah had been brought up by a wise father.)

But all this meant nothing whatever to the Ranee.

(The Ranee had been brought up by a foolish mother.)

The Rajah always saw in Kara a faithful servant.

The Ranee only saw in Kara—a handsome man. . . . . .

The Rajah had been married for almost a year.

During that time he had never been separated from his wife for a single day.

But then he was summoned to the Viceregal palace, to consult with the Viceroy on matters connected with the government of the Province of Jurma.

He was to be gone for six days.

And so he was sad.

He held his wife in his arms.

She lay there limp.

He kissed her on the mouth.

She felt no thrill.

He tore himself away.

She heaved a sigh of relief.

The Rajah left the palace with tears in his eyes.

The Ranee went to her apartments with smiles on her lips.

That night the Ranee sent for Kara, the personal attendant of her husband.

"Why did you not go with your master?" said the Ranee.

"It was not the wish of my lord," said Kara.

"And what *was* the wish of your lord?" said the Ranee.

"That I should remain with my lady," said Kara.

"And what were you to do for me?" said the Ranee.

"I was to guard you," said Kara.

"Guard me—from what?" said the Ranee.

"From—danger," said Kara.

"The only danger that I fear is—loneliness!" said the Ranee.

The Ranee looked in Kara's eyes.

Kara looked on the ground.

"It was at my wish that your master bade you stay," said the Ranee.

"Yes, my lady," said Kara.

"Did you know that?" said the Ranee.

"No, my lady," said Kara.

"Well, what do you say now that you *do* know it?" said the Ranee.

"I thank you, my lady," said Kara.

"You thank me—for what?" said the Ranee.

"For your trust, my lady," said Kara.

"I do not call it—trust," said the Ranee.

Kara was silent.

"I call it—esteem," said the Ranee.

Still Kara was silent.

"I admire you," said the Ranee.

Why did he not speak to her?

"And I—shall be—lonely!" said the Ranee.

Why did he not look at her?

"Is there anything that I can do for my lady," said Kara.

His voice was the voice of a servant.

"No, not to-night!" said the Ranee.

Her voice was the voice of the mistress

. . . . .

The next night the Ranee sent for Kara a second time.

"How long have you been with your master?" said the Ranee.

"Seven years, my lady," said Kara.

"You have been in his personal service throughout that time?" said the Ranee.

"Yes, my lady," said Kara.

"And you have also been in his confidence?" said the Ranee.

"Yes, my lady," said Kara.

"Then be in mine also," said the Ranee.

Kara looked surprised.

"And let me be in yours," said the Ranee.

Kara looked bewildered.

"Your master has had adventures?" said the Ranee.

"Many, my lady," said Kara.

"Adventures with men?" said the Ranee.

"Yes, my lady," said Kara.

"And adventures with—women?" said the Ranee.

"No, my lady," said Kara.

"Oh, he must have!" said the Ranee.

"I do not know, my lady," said Kara.

"Try to recollect!" said the Ranee.

"I cannot, my lady," said Kara.

"You refuse to tell me?" said the Ranee.

"I have nothing to tell, my lady," said Kara.

"Nothing to tell—after seven years!" said the Ranee.

"My duty has been to serve him," said Kara.

"And your duty is now to amuse me!" said the Ranee.

"I am sorry, my lady," said Kara.

"So am I!" said the Ranee.

"Is there anything more, my lady?" said Kara.

"No—you may go!" said the Ranee. . .

The next night the Ranee sent for Kara a third time.

Kara stood at the door.

"Come here!" said the Ranee.

Kara came into the room.

"Here before me!" said the Ranee.

Kara approached her.

"Here beside me!" said the Ranee.

Kara hesitated.

The Ranee spang to her feet.

She flung herself upon his breast.

She curled her arms around his neck.

She kissed him on the mouth.

"I love you!" whispered the Ranee.

He resisted her.

He repulsed her.

He pushed her away from him.

"My lady!" cried Kara. "I—"

"You—what?" said the Ranee.

"I—must—go!" said Kara.

"Why?" said the Ranee.

"I am a servant," said Kara.

"I have forgotten that!" said the Ranee.

"But I have not!" said Kara.

"What do you mean?" said the Ranee.

"I am the servant of the Rajah—your husband!" said Kara.

"What of that?" said the Ranee.

"I serve—*him!*" said Kara.

"And not—me?" said the Ranee.

"I serve—*him!*" repeated Kara.

"You must serve me too!" said the Ranee.

"In what way, my lady?" said Kara.

"You must—love me!" said the Ranee.

"I—cannot!" said Kara.

"You—must!" said the Ranee.

"I—will not!" said Kara.

She flung her arms around him again.

And again he pushed her away from him.

"He will never know!" whispered the Ranee.

"I cannot stay!" said Kara.

"I will give you money!" said the Ranee.

"I must go!" said Kara.

"Do you know what you are doing?" said the Ranee.

"I know, my lady!" said Kara.

"And do you know what *I* can do?" said the Ranee.

"I know that too, my lady!" said Kara.

"Very well, then!" said the Ranee; "you need not wait! You may go! But you shall go—to the dungeon!"

He stood silent.

She hesitated.

"Do you hear?" said the Ranee.

"I hear, my lady," said Kara.

"Which do you choose," said the Ranee; "the dungeon, and chains, or gold, and *me?*"

"I am the Rajah's servant," said Kara, "but it is for the Ranee to put me in chains, —if she sees fit to do so!"

"And by heaven, I *do* see fit to do so!" said the Ranee.

She struck a gong.

A servant entered.

"Call the guard!" said the Ranee.

The servant clapped his hands.

Two guardsmen appeared.

"This man has made an attack upon me!" said the Ranee. "Put him in chains, and throw him into the dungeon—until the Rajah returns!" . .

The guard seized upon Kara, and led him out of the apartment of the Ranee.

And the Ranee, left to the women who came hurrying to her assistance, gave way to a fit of rage.

"The dog, the dog, the dog!" cried the Ranee.

And, in her fury, she tore her veil to shreds.

This veil was, in the East, the symbol of modesty. . . . . .

Three days later, the Rajah of Jurma returned to his palace.

He went at once to the apartment of the Ranee.

And the Ranee at once informed him of the attack made upon her by Kara, his servant.

"It seems incredible!" cried the Rajah.

"But it is true!" cried the Ranee.

"What did he do?" said the Rajah.

"As soon as you went away," said the Ranee, "in fact, the very first night you were gone, he came to me and said that you had left him to guard me, and that he meant to guard me from—loneliness! I dismissed him. The next night he came a second time, and wanted to tell me of your adventures—with women! I dismissed him again. And then the next night he came a third time, and sprang upon me, and seized me in his arms, and—"

"He must be mad!" cried the Rajah.

"Not at all!" cried the Ranee.

"Where is he now?" said the Rajah.

"He is in the dungeon!" said the Ranee.

"What shall we do with him?" said the Rajah.

"He must be punished!" said the Ranee.

"Of course!" said the Rajah.

"He should be whipped!" said the Ranee.

"Very well," said the Rajah.

"And at once!" said the Ranee.

"Without delay!" said the Rajah.

"Have him brought here!" said the Ranee.

The Rajah gave the order to a servant and in a short time Kara was brought into the room, loaded with chains, and guarded by six men.

Kara stood before the Rajah and the Ranee.

His face was wan.

His hair was wild.

But his eyes—

His eyes were like the eyes of a faithful dog that has tried to lick the hand of its master, and has been rewarded with a kick.

Kara did not look at the Ranee.

He only looked at the Rajah.

"Kara, what thing is this that I hear—" began the Rajah.

"Let him be whipped!" said the Ranee.

"Kara, what demon possessed you that you should—" began the Rajah.

"Let him be whipped!" cried the Ranee.

"Kara—after all these years—" began the Rajah.

"Shall I or shall I not be avenged?" cried the Ranee.

"Let him be whipped!" said the Rajah.

A strong man stepped forward.

He bore a thick whip.

And he lashed Kara across the back, again, and again, and again.

Kara stood there, and never made a move, and never uttered a sound.

"You are not hurting him!" cried the Ranee. "You are not trying to hurt him! He does not feel it! Give *me* the whip! Let *me* punish him.

The Ranee sprang up from her couch, and seizing the whip from the hands of the servant, herself began to brutally lash the body of the unfortunate Kara.

The flesh was ripped and torn.

The blood streamed down his limbs.

But still he made no move.

And still he made no sound.

The Ranee stopped.

She turned to the Rajah.

"Here, *you* must whip him!" cried the Ranee. "It does not hurt him coming from me! But it *may* hurt him coming from you!"

"But I—" began the Rajah.

"I must be avenged!" cried the Ranee, "and *you* must avenge me!"

The Rajah took the bloodstained whip from the hands of the Ranee.

He raised it aloft.

But Kara fell to the ground before the blow was struck.

He had fainted.

BETTY AND BUDDHA

BETTY AND BUDDHA

BETTY was tired of Bob.
And Bert.
And Reggie.

So she took up with Buddha.

Bob was too hot.

Bert was too cold.

And Reggie was neither hot nor cold—merely lukewarm.

Men seemed all wrong.

But Buddha seemed just right.

One need never worry about him.

He could always be relied upon.

So Betty made a fuss of him.

She got silver for his garments.

And gold for his features.

And pearls for his eyes.

First she gave him a shrine.

Then she gave him a corner of a room.

And finally she gave him a whole room to himself.

She got oriental draperies for the wall,

oriental rugs for the floor, and oriental odds and ends for every nook and cranny.

And, last but not least, she got oriental silks and satins and jewels—for herself.

She said that these were for—Buddha.

But, be that as it may, she looked very well in them.

And, in her heart of hearts, she was well aware of the fact.

Betty had never been on the stage.

Bnt she had acted—all her life.

She had played the heroine in many little comedies and tragedies.

And in this, her latest production—she had Buddha for the hero.

Betty was not only a temperamental actress—she was also an artistic stage manager.

She had a wonderful eye for situations and effects.

She always saw that the scenes were properly set.

And she loved art for art's sake.

But to-day she wished that she had an audience to view the performance—or, at any rate, that she had a few dramatic critics present.

It was matinee.

The hour was four o'clock.
Curtains were drawn over the windows.
Candles were lighted in brackets.
Incense was burning in braziers.
And Betty wore her Eastern robes.
She was draped in yellow silk.
She was decked in golden ornaments.
And she was possessed of the spirit of adoration. . . . . .
She sang to Buddha.
A song of praise.
Her voice was sweet.
She danced for Buddha.
A dance of joy.
Her steps were light.
She prayed for Buddha.
A prayer of peace.
Her eyes were sad.
"O Buddha!" cried Betty, "I would learn of thee! Teach me thy will!"
She stood before him.
But Buddha made no sign.
"O Buddha!" cried Betty, "I do not ask for much—only for a little!"
She knelt before him.
Still Buddha made no sign.
"O Buddha!" cried Betty. "I would be at peace! At peace with the world!"

She prostrated herself before him.
And still Buddha made no sign.
Betty waited.
And waited.
And waited. . . . .
All of a sudden there was a sound.
Betty started.
What could it be?
The sound was repeated.
It was a knock at the door.
Betty heaved a sigh.
She rose to her feet.
Come in!" said Betty.
A servant entered the room.
"What is it?" said Betty.
"Mr. Billy is here," said the servant.
"Show him in!" said Betty.
Her face was a study.
The servant left the room.
Betty went to a glass.
She inspected herself.
She was satisfied with the reflection.
She had cause to be.
A man entered the room.
This was "Mr. Billy."
"Hello, Betty!" said Billy.
"Hello, Billy!" said Betty.

"Am I disturbing you?" said Billy.

"Not at all!" said Betty.

"Would you rather I went away?" said Billy.

"On the contrary!" said Betty.

She curled herself on her divan under a canopy.

He perched himself on a stool beside her.

She rattled her bracelets.

He stroked his chin.

"You look very charming," said Billy.

"I feel very happy," said Betty.

"May I ask what you have been doing?" said Billy.

"You may," said Betty.

"And will you tell me?" said Billy.

"I will," said Betty.

"Well?" said Billy.

"I have been worshipping Buddha!" said Betty.

"Not really?" said Billy.

"Yes really!" said Betty.

"Do you believe in him?" said Billy.

"Of course!" said Betty.

"I don't!" said Billy.

"You don't believe in anything," said Betty.

"Oh, yes, I do," said Billy.

"Well, what do you believe in?" said Betty.

"I believe in—you!" said Billy.

"Be serious!" said Betty.

"I am!" said Billy.

"But Buddha is a god." said Betty.

"And you are a goddess," said Billy.

"But he answers my prayers," said Betty.

" And you answer mine," said Billy.

"Do I?" said Betty.

"I hope so!" said Billy.

"What do you pray for?" said Betty.

"Shall I tell you?" said Billy.

"I've asked you to," said Betty.

"I pray for love!" said Billy.

"Ah!" said Betty.

"For your love," said Billy.

"Oh!" said Betty.

"Do you answer my prayer?" said Billy.

"I—don't—know!" said Betty.

He leaned towards her.

He took her in his arms.

And he breathed his prayer—with a kiss.

She shrank from him.

She hid her face.

And then she answered his prayer—and his kiss. . . . . .

Her head, with its glittering ornaments, rested on his shoulder.

Her arms, with their jingling bangles, twined around his neck.

And her mouth, with its maddening caress, clung to his.

The candles cast a soft glow over them.

The incense sent a sweet odor around them.

And Buddha kept a watchful eye upon them. . . . . .

Billy was about to kiss her again.

But Betty released herself from his embrace.

She got up.

She walked over to the shrine.

And she turned Buddha around—so that he could not see.

Then she went back to Billy—and answered his prayer, and his kiss—all over again. . . . . .

In the beginning, we stated that Betty was tired of Bob.

And Bert.

And Reggie.

And, in the end, we will state that Betty was tired of Buddha, too.

Buddha was only a god.
But Betty was not tired of Billy.
Billy was—a man!

MRS. PEPPER IN PARIS

MRS. PEPPER IN PARIS

MRS. PEPPER went to Paris.
She went alone.
And so she was—lonely.
Why had she ever left New York?
Why had she ever wanted to leave New York?
Why had she ever wanted to leave New York—alone?
Tom had offered to go with her.
And so had Dick.
And so had Harry.
But she had wanted to be alone.
And she got what she wanted.
And a great deal more.
Good Lord!
What a place!
What a disgusting place!
Nothing to see!
Nowhere to go!
Nothing to do!
Who thought that Paris was gay?
Mrs. Pepper didn't!

She thought that it was miserable.
Who thought that French women were stylish?
Mrs. Pepper didn't!
She thought that they were frumps!
Who thought that French men were polite?
Mrs. Pepper didn't!
She thought that they were boors!
So she wrote to Tom, in New York.
And to Dick, in New York.
And to Harry, in New York.
And she said, "I hate Paris!"
In the morning, she walked—alone.
Mile after mile.
In the afternoon, she drove—alone.
Hour after hour.
In the evening, she dined—alone.
Course after course.
But what was the good of anything?
Nothing!
She met a Count.
But he was a Frenchman.
And a puppet.
She met a Baron.
But he was a Russian.
And a savage.
Then she met—a Man.

He was an American.
And a gentleman.
She met him in the Bois de Boulogne.
It was in the morning.
She was walking.
So was he.
She was walking up.
He was walking down.
They met.
He looked at her.
She looked at him.
They passed.
He looked around.
So did she.
She walked on.
He followed her.
She knew when he was behind her.
She knew when he was beside her.
And then he spoke.
"I beg your pardon!" said the Man.
"What is it?" said the Woman.
"Please do not misunderstand me," said the Man.
"I will try not to," said the Woman.
"I am an American," said the Man.
"Yes," said the Woman.
"I am here alone," said the Man.
"Well?" said the Woman.

"And I am—lonely," said the Man.

"What has this to do with me?" said the Woman.

"That is what I want to know," said the Man.

"Indeed?" said the Woman.

"You are an American," said the Man.

"Yes," said the Woman.

"You are here alone," said the Man.

"I am," said the Woman.

"And you are—lonely," said the Man.

"I am—not," said the Woman.

"Oh, I thought you were!" said the Man.

"Well, you have made a mistake!" said the Woman.

"You *have* misunderstood me!" said the Man.

"No," said the Woman, *"you* have misunderstood *me!"*

She walked away.

He stood still.

* * * * * *

That afternoon, when she drove, she saw the Man and he saw her.

That night, when she dined, she saw the Man and he saw her.

The next morning, when she walked, she saw the Man and he saw her.

And so it went—morning, noon and night.

Day after day.

He never spoke.

He never made a sign.

And neither did she.

But he was always—there.

* * * * * *

Now he was a Man.

And she was a Woman.

He was an American.

And so was she.

So at last—one evening, in the foyer of the hotel, she bowed to him.

He came over to her.

She held out her hand.

He took it.

He looked into her eyes.

She looked into his.

"You *are* lonely!" said the Man.

"No," said the Woman, "not any more!"

* * * * * *

Mrs. Pepper wrote to Tom, in New York.

And to Dick, in New York.

And to Harry, in New York.

And she said, "I love Paris!"

MOON-MADNESS

MOON-MADNESS

IT was noontime.
Noontime in Bombay.
Nana Lalla fared forth through the town.
The streets were narrow and winding.
They were lined with shops.
Goldsmiths and silversmiths.
Fruit-shops and sweet-shops.
Merchants and money changers.
Before these booths people stopped and stared.
Bargained and bartered.
Went in, or went on.
Great throngs tramped up and down.
To and fro.
Shoulder to shoulder.
Some in flowing robes.
Some in scanty rags.
Dogs trotted at one's side.
Bullocks pushed at one's back.
And all the time the sun shone in the sky.
Shone like a ball of fire.

It burned the world with its blazing beams.
Nana Lalla hated the day.
And she loathed the sun.
She did not look to the left.
Nor to the right.
She looked straight before her.
And she went her way.

It was midnight.
Midnight in Bombay.
Nana Lalla was in her room.
She lay on her couch.
Her eyes were open.
But she was dreaming.
Dreaming of sweet-smelling flowers.
And soft-splashing fountains.
And bright-beaming eyes.
Of such things the poets prated.
Of such things the singers sang.
And Nana Lalla had read the poets' rhymes.
And Nana Lalla had heard the singers' melodies.
She delighted in these things.
Delighted in them exceedingly.
She tossed and she turned.
She sighed and she sobbed.

And then she arose.
She went to the window.
She looked through the lattice.
The moon shone in the sky.
Shone like a pool of silver.
It bathed the world in liquid light.
Nana Lalla loved the night.
And she worshipped the moon.

Nana Lalla wound a scarf about her body.
Draped a shawl over her head.
And slipped sandals on her feet.
She stole out of her room.
She slipped out of the house.
And once again she fared forth through the town.

Never had Nana Lalla known such a night.
Never had Nana Lalla seen such a moon.
So soft, and so silver.
So gentle, and so gracious.
And yet with all, so—maddening.
Nana Lalla's eyes sparkled.
Nana Lalla's hands trembled.
And Nana Lalla's heart beat high.

Oh, could she only flee away from the city!

Could she only flee away to the country!

Could she only flee away—by the light of the moon!

Or else—could only something happen!

Something strange.

Something sweet.

If only—

Someone stood before her.

Someone spoke to her.

Someone touched her arm.

It was a man.

And yes—his eyes were sparkling too.

His hands were trembling also.

And his heart was beating as wildly as was hers.

She could see.

She could tell.

She could feel.

He and she were alone.

Alone at midnight.

And the moon was shining.

How she loved the moon!

And perhaps he loved it too.

Nana Lalla was not afraid.

Instead, she was full of hope.

He must *love* the moon—even as did she!

So, when he touched her, she did not shrink away.

When he took her in his arms, she yielded herself.

And when he kissed her—she responded.

. . . . .

The Man always remembered Nana Lalla.

He had loved her.

And he thought that she had loved him.

But Nana Lalla soon forgot the Man.

She had not loved him.

She had only loved—the Moon. . . . . .

THE END

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